

Council conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people

(2013/C 168/03)

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS ISSUE, IN PARTICULAR:

1. European cooperation in the youth field ⁽¹⁾ which identifies well-being and social inclusion as two of its eight fields of action and emphasises the support and development of youth work as a cross-sectoral response in meeting the overall objectives of the framework; and which recommends an increasing focus on social inclusion, health and well-being of young people;
2. the Communication from the Commission 'Europe 2020' as endorsed by the European Council which recognises the role of youth work as a provider of non-formal learning opportunities to all young people;
3. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽²⁾;
4. the Joint Conclusions of the EU Youth Conference organised by the Irish Presidency, 11-13 March 2013 ⁽³⁾;

BUILDING UPON:

5. the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 19 November 2010, on youth work which calls for better understanding of and an enhanced role, specifically in relation to the promotion, support and development of youth work on a range of levels,

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT:

6. Young people actively contribute to the social infrastructure and to the vibrancy of communities, both geographical and communities of interest. Young people comprise a diverse and dynamic population with different realities, needs, demands and aspirations. Demography, biography, diversity, transitions and opportunities are issues which impact directly on, and occasionally define, young people.

⁽¹⁾ Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1) and the 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field ('EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018') (OJ C 394, 20.12.2012, p. 5).

⁽²⁾ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ 7808/13.

Therefore, youth policy should be reflective of and responsive to such issues, be both enabling and empowering and promote equal opportunities for all young people.

7. 'Youth work' is a broad term covering a broad scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of 'out-of-school' education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders. Youth work is organised in different ways (by youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities). It is delivered in different forms and settings (e.g. open-access, group-based, programme-based, outreach and detached) and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level.
8. Youth work focuses on the personal and social development of young people and has an extended reach which accesses and engages young people based on their needs and interests and takes account of their environment. Such coverage and reach complements other policy responses for young people and therefore youth work can offer young people points of contact, association and progression.
9. Social inclusion requires a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to address the multi-faceted nature of marginalisation and exclusion in society.
10. Youth work plays an important role in preventing social exclusion and enhancing social inclusion. Youth work offers developmental spaces and opportunities for all young people and 'is based on non-formal and informal learning process ⁽⁴⁾ and on voluntary participation' ⁽⁵⁾.
11. Effective youth work and youth initiatives seek to empower young people and encourage their active participation in society. It equips them with skills, competences and experiences for life, thereby maximising the protective factors which enhance the development, well-being, autonomy and social inclusion of all young people, including those with fewer opportunities.

⁽⁴⁾ 'Non-formal learning and informal learning' as defined in the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C 398, 22.12.2012).

⁽⁵⁾ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 19 November 2010, on youth work, p. 3.

12. Quality youth work is a commitment to continually ensuring and enhancing optimum youth work provision and practice for young people. It's about youth organisations, youth services and youth workers working with relevant stakeholders to plan and deliver activities and programmes that are relevant and responsive to young people's interests, needs and experiences, and which are evidence-informed and outcomes-focused. The result of quality youth work should be that young people derive maximum benefit from their participation in youth work,

CONSIDER THAT:

13. Social inclusion should accommodate and include all young people and the issues they face, with special emphasis on those with fewer opportunities.

The potential of youth work to contribute to policy objectives including social inclusion can be further optimised through a quality-focused and evidence-informed approach which places young people centre-stage in the design and the delivery of youth work provision. This approach supports young people's participation, development and progression in a way which affirms their strengths, enhances resilience and competences and recognises their potential to build individual, communal and social capital. Quality youth work is a universal theme which benefits young people, improves the practice of youth work, and contributes to broader policy aims.

- (a) Youth work engages young people during a significant developmental period of their lives, and therefore it is ideally positioned to enhance the development (personal, social, educational, vocational and occupational), well-being and social inclusion of young people.
- (b) Youth work offers experiences and opportunities for all young people and operates as both an open-access activity and as a targeted support that can enhance the competences of young people while addressing the barriers they encounter, and may have a particular role for young people with fewer opportunities and those young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- (c) The organisation of youth work is diverse. This richness and diversity (sectoral, organisational and thematic) should be acknowledged.
- (d) Youth work should have a clearly defined position on the continuum of education and lifelong learning and spanning the areas of non-formal and informal learning. Such a position should acknowledge the potential of youth work in meeting the needs of

young people to an even greater extent than at present and value the role of youth work in building an inclusive society.

- (e) A quality approach informed by evidence can be an important tool to enhance the accessibility, visibility, impact and the effectiveness of youth work policy and provision.
- (f) Quality youth work may include appropriate assessment systems, based on self-assessment or peer-assessment, and where feasible, validated by external assessment. Such systems assist youth work organisations, programmes and activities, and can improve organisational capacity and effectiveness, and provide clarity to the public regarding the offer and impact of youth work.
- (g) Quality systems ensure that the voice of young people is central in the design and delivery of youth work that organisations, programmes and activities are responsive and relevant to the needs and aspirations of young people.
- (h) Quality systems assist youth workers in improving their practice and skills development through creating a structure and space for reflection, dialogue and action.
- (i) Youth work, through its emphasis on personal and social development, contributes to a range of policy outcomes for young people, most notably in the areas of education and training, health, employment, and participation in culture and sport. While recognising the distinctive functions of youth work, greater emphasis could be placed on identifying the contribution youth work can make to these broader policy areas,

IDENTIFY THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES TO ENSURE AND ENHANCE QUALITY YOUTH WORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT, WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE:

14. In aiming to ensure that youth work is relevant and responsive to both the interests and needs of young people and to optimise its role in contributing to their development, well-being and social inclusion, the following priorities have been identified:

- (a) promote the complementary position of youth work in the continuum of education and lifelong learning which aims to enhance the experience of young people and equip them for life;

- (b) support greater alignment of youth policy (how priorities are set), provision (how organisations, programmes and activities are organised), and practice (how organisations, programmes and activities are delivered) through emphasising closer collaboration and knowledge exchange between the policy, research, practice and youth communities to ensure more coordinated, evidence-informed youth work responses;
- (c) promote mechanisms to ensure that youth work is quality-based, outcomes-focused and evidence-informed;
- (d) develop supportive quality frameworks, including assessment tools, for use in youth work as a means to maximise the impact for young people's development, well-being and social inclusion. Such frameworks should be implemented, supported and communicated appropriately and involve all stakeholders including young people;
- (e) work to ensure that youth work initiatives (provision and practice) are informed by the voice and aspirations of young people themselves, thus providing an inclusive space for young people to develop and be empowered;
- (f) while respecting the distinctive integrity and impact of youth work, determine and recognise the personal, social and professional skills and competences deriving from the young people's participation in youth work to make visible the impact of youth work to related policy areas and practice disciplines,
- INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY TO:
15. promote, through the open method of coordination, a strengthening of relationships, both in policy and practice, with youth-related areas such as health, education and training, employment, culture and sport;
 16. promote, in youth work provision and practice, an emphasis on quality and the attainment of youth work outcomes which contribute to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people;
 17. support greater collaboration amongst all youth work stakeholders (in particular researchers, policymakers, civil society organisations, practitioners and young people) to determine the impact of quality youth work, for young people themselves, the youth sector and related policy areas, e.g. through the development of evidence of the impact of quality youth work and by facilitating and improving the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning at national and EU levels;
 18. encourage and support young people through education, civil society and quality youth initiatives to participate in democratic life and to make use of existing and new tools to contribute to policy development, thereby enhancing their development, well-being and social inclusion;
 19. promote, through quality youth work opportunities and programmes, experiential learning and skills development, including transferable skills for young people, and the recognition and validation of such skills and competences;
 20. support the youth sector in developing its structures, working methods and channels of communication so as to reach out to more young people, especially those at risk of social exclusion;
 21. stimulate and support volunteer-led involvement in youth provision to promote diversity, social inclusion and build social capital;
 22. promote the contribution of quality youth work by maximising funding opportunities to support effective youth work;
 23. encourage, through the relevant programmes, platforms and resource repositories, the European and international exchange of good practices, training, skills acquisition and peer-learning in relation to quality-focused youth work;
 24. establish a thematic expert group to examine youth work quality systems in EU Member States with a view to exploring how common indicators or frameworks may be developed. The work of this group will be informed by the forthcoming study of the European Commission. This will culminate in a report outlining recommendations to be presented to the Youth Working Party. A draft outline of the suggested terms of reference and membership of this thematic expert group is contained in the Annex,
- INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:
25. seek to build on the findings of its forthcoming study on the value of youth work in identifying what initiatives are required to promote quality-based and effective youth work;

26. take account of other research studies and initiatives in this area. Disseminate the findings and develop learning for the policy, research, practice and youth communities, and for related policy areas;
 27. consider a suitable follow-up to the forthcoming study on the value of youth work and the outcome of the thematic expert group on quality youth work.
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ANNEX

Draft terms of reference and suggested membership criteria for thematic expert group to be established by European Union Member States and the Commission**Purpose**

To examine youth work quality systems in EU Member States and explore how common indicators or frameworks may be developed. This will include an illustration of the practice, process and product of youth work and the impact of youth work for the engagement, development and progression of young people.

Membership

- The participation of Member States in this thematic expert group will be voluntary. Member States may join at any time.
- Member States should nominate, via the Commission, individuals with experience and expertise in the thematic area. Nominees will ensure that national authorities and other relevant stakeholders are informed of the progress of the expert group.
- The thematic expert group may invite additional nominees to the group if required.
- The thematic expert group may also invite representatives of youth stakeholders and representatives from non-EU 'Youth in Action' or subsequent programme countries as it deems appropriate.

Working procedures

- The work of the thematic expert group will be task-focused and time-bound (a maximum of 18 months duration). Detailed terms of reference and a concise programme of work with measurable and achievable outputs will be developed by the group.
 - A chair and co-chair will be nominated by the group at the initial meeting of the thematic expert group.
 - All meetings will be held in Brussels; however, Member States may host occasional meetings, if desired.
 - The Commission will provide expertise, logistical and secretarial support in the establishment and running of this expert group.
 - The group will provide the Youth Working Party regular updates of the progress.
 - A final report of the expert group including recommendations will be presented to the Youth Working Party to inform the development of youth work policy and provision.
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